

## **VIII. OPERATIONS ISSUES**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Division of Parks and Recreation staff identified the major park issues facing Carolina Beach State Park at the initiation of the general management plan process. The issues have been divided into three categories: natural resources (see Chapter VI), capital improvements (see Chapter VII) and operations. This chapter identifies park operations issues and makes recommendations for addressing them during the next five years.

Operations issues for Carolina Beach State Park that are of significant concern are:

- Management of the Carolina Beach State Park Marina
  - Maintenance Dredging of Marina Channel and Basin
  - Location of a Suitable Spoil Site
  - Inadequate Parking
  - Inadequate Number of Boat Slips
- Inadequate Maintenance Facilities
- Picnic Area
  - Lack of Shelter
  - Lack of Parking
- Tent and Trailer Campground
  - Damage to Resources
  - Lack of Electrical/Water Hookups
  - Inadequate Facilities
- Radio Communications and Water Tower
- Staffing Needs

### **MANAGEMENT OF CAROLINA BEACH STATE PARK MARINA**

#### **Background**

The Carolina Beach State Park Marina is the only state-owned and operated marina in North Carolina (the four other marinas are operated by lessees). It has been in operation for approximately 30 years. As with all older facilities, the 42-slip marina, two boat ramps, fuel dock and marina building are requiring increased maintenance.

Parking in the marina parking lot routinely fills to capacity on weekends spring through fall. Once the parking lots reach capacity, boaters, fisherman, and other visitors park on the hill next to the boat basin, along the edges of the parking lots, and along both sides of the park road. This results in increased congestion and opportunities for accidents.

There are no single-vehicle parking spaces located in the southwest marina parking lot where the Sugarloaf trailhead is located. Visitors using the Sugarloaf Trail park in the boat/trailer parking spaces, along the edges of the parking lot, or along the roadside. In addition, the existing boat/trailer parking spaces are too short to accommodate many of

today's SUV/extended cab vehicles pulling boats. This results in boat trailers extending out past the end of the parking space, decreasing the width of the travel lane.

The park currently leases 42 boat slips. Thirty-four slips are rented for terms of one to three years. Eight slips and the ends of the T-docks are rented as transient slips. There is a waiting list of 170 people for the long-term slips, and the approximate waiting time for a slip is two years. Many others would likely be on the list were the wait not so long, so public demand for marina services seem high.

Costs of the marina operation are high considering the number of staff needed for operation and the modest amounts of revenue. For 2002/2003 revenues were: \$86,000 from boat slip rentals and boat ramp fees; \$47,000 in gross marina sales; \$201,600 for gas and \$57,300 for diesel fuel sales; and pumpout fees of \$720. Marinas generally operate with more slips, and a capital improvement project exists that would construct an additional dock with boat slips on the northeast side of the basin (Figure VIII-1). Adding the slips would provide space for no more than fourteen additional boats. However, it is uncertain if that section of the basin could be dredged to allow anything other than small boats due to the height of the bulkhead wall.



**Figure VIII-1. Marina Expansion Location**

Sand and silt constantly accumulate in the channel and boat basin. Both were dredged in 1988 and partially dredged again in the spring of 2000. There were problems, especially at low tide beginning several years prior to the last dredging.

Finding a suitable spoil site or sites located close enough to the park so that spoil transportation costs are not prohibitively expensive is a key to continued long-term operation of the marina. The spoil island located in the Cape Fear River that received spoil from the last dredging is, according to the Corps of Engineers, unavailable for such future use. The next dredging will need to be a full dredging. A capital improvement project to dredge the marina, complete needed marina repairs, and build additional docks has been developed and is described in Chapter VII (page VII-8). Docks will need to be removed from the pilings for accumulated silt to be removed, and hardware will need to be replaced.

### **Recommendations**

Prior to proceeding with the capital improvement project to dredge, repair and expand the marina, several steps are needed. Park staff will take depth readings of the marina basin and channel. Division staff will then assess the adequacy of current depths, estimate when dredging should take place, and make rough estimates of the number of cubic feet of material that needs to be dredged. Division staff or a contractor will then investigate locating a suitable spoil site and obtaining the necessary permits to proceed with the project. Attempts will be made to locate a spoil site or sites close to the park that will not only serve the next dredging, but inevitable maintenance dredges that will follow in the future.

Assuming that a suitable spoil site or sites can be located, the Division will proceed with the proposed capital improvement project for the marina. The size and configuration of boat slips will be reviewed in an attempt to maximize the carrying capacity and public use of the marina and to increase revenue from boat slip rentals. The optimum dredging depth will also need to be investigated.

If environmentally suitable and cost-effective spoil sites cannot be found for the currently proposed and future dredges, the Division will investigate other alternatives to current marina operations. Factors to consider include the significant expense of the proposed marina capital improvement project (estimated at \$1.23 million), inevitable future maintenance dredging, periodic dock maintenance, the number of staff needed to operate the marina, the modest revenue from marina operations, public demand, and the small number of pleasure craft owners that benefit from the marina. Even if marina operations were to cease, the boat ramps should remain, however, as they are popular and operate at a low cost. The marina building could possibly be converted for alternative uses and a picnic shelter could be added to the area if marina operations ever cease.

The boat/trailer parking lot needs to be expanded. Existing spaces need to be lengthened, if possible and single vehicle spaces need to be added near the Sugarloaf trailhead. Due to the heavy use of the boat ramp, fishing pier and trail, this project should occur regardless of the marina status. This parking expansion is part of a proposed capital improvement project (see Chapter VII, page VII-8).

Park staff will periodically review the fee schedule for marina services by comparing them to area marinas and will report these findings to the District Superintendent and Superintendent of State Parks.

## **INADEQUATE MAINTENANCE FACILITIES**

### **Background**

Both Carolina Beach State Park and Fort Fisher State Recreation Area use the Carolina Beach State Park maintenance area. Designed to serve only one park, the maintenance area has inadequate storage facilities for supplies, flammable materials, lumber, vehicles and equipment. All work on vehicles and equipment is currently accomplished in the shop building, thereby severely limiting any other work that needs to be accomplished at the same time using shop equipment such as table saws, radial arm saws, et cetera. Given the frequency of the vehicle repairs and routine service, the shop building and its stationary equipment are often unavailable for use.

### **Recommendations**

Provide maintenance area improvements as identified in the existing Maintenance Area Improvements capital improvement project (Chapter VII, page VII-8). The improvements include construction of a flammable storage building, a vehicular storage building with vehicle lift and vehicle wash station, and renovation of existing buildings.

## **PICNIC AREA**

### **Background**

The picnic area is used by an increasingly large number of visitors, including school groups, especially during the spring and fall. Park staff also conduct interpretive programs in the picnic area for large school groups. There is no structure to offer shade or protection from inclement weather in the picnic area; therefore a picnic shelter is needed.

Bus parking is inadequate. During the spring and fall there may be as many as six charter buses in the lot at one time, leaving no room for any other vehicles. At the same time, there may be several other buses parked at the visitor's center or marina because they cannot get into the picnic area.

Sufficient room for optimal parking at the picnic area does not exist. Wetlands constrain parking lot expansion in one direction, while the picnic area already occupies most of the adjacent high ground.

### **Recommendations**

Construct a 12-table picnic shelter and add parking at the picnic area to the extent feasible. A capital improvement project to make picnic area improvements and expand parking has been created (see Chapter VII, page VII-8). Investigate the possibility of constructing a picnic shelter at the marina area if the marina operation is reduced or eliminated.

## **TENT AND TRAILER CAMPGROUND**

### **Background**

The campground is a popular facility regularly filling to capacity during the warm months. Through the years, campers have placed their tents further from the campground road resulting in the gradual expansion of the campsites. As the campsites have grown, additional soil has been compacted and additional vegetation damaged.

There is a steady increase in the number of RV's and campers used by park visitors. The park has no sites with electric and water hookups. Campers are allowed to use generators except during quiet hours.

The washhouse facilities do not meet ADA regulations and are in need of renovation. Siding and plumbing fixtures need replacing and ventilation problems need to be addressed.

### **Recommendations**

Continue to request funds through major maintenance to renovate the campsites by installing impact pads and delineating the campsite driveways by the placement of bollards. Create a new capital improvement project that will make campground improvements including electric and water hookups to one loop of the campground. Not only will this provide service

to visitors with RV's and campers, it will also provide for a quieter, more enjoyable camping experience than results with the use of generators.

There is a project currently under contract to make the washhouse facilities ADA compliant. Park staff should request major maintenance funding to address siding, plumbing and ventilation problems. If such improvements are not made before the Tent/Trailer Campground Improvement project is funded, they will be undertaken as a part of that project.

## **RADIO COMMUNICATIONS AND WATER TOWER**

### **Background**

The radio serving both Carolina Beach State Park and Fort Fisher State Recreation Area is located on top of the old 90-foot tall water tower at Carolina Beach State Park. Since tying on to the water system of the Town of Carolina Beach, the water tower is no longer used for its intended purpose. The tower is rusting and in need of repair if it is to remain. The use of the tower at this time is to house the repeater, provide a structure for the antenna, and provide a small amount of storage space.

### **Recommendations**

Operations staff should identify suitable alternative repeater and antenna sites as the water tower should be disassembled and salvaged. Possible alternative antenna sites include existing towers in the Town of Carolina Beach. Any proposed location must also be accessible from Fort Fisher State Recreation Area.

## **STAFFING NEEDS**

### **Background**

The visitor's center and marina require continuous staff presence during operating hours all year. The marina is staffed until 15 minutes prior to scheduled park closing and the visitor center is staffed from eight a.m. until five p.m. daily. Due to recurring absence of supporting seasonal and permanent staff, the park superintendent and park rangers must devote much of their time to staffing these facilities. This responsibility removes them from more important duties in administration, providing interpretive programming, managing natural resources and providing for visitor protection and safety. Contributing to the recurring absence of seasonal staff is the low hourly wage of the positions.

### **Recommendations**

An additional Office Assistant or Processing Assistant position should be created to divide time between the marina and the visitor center. This would provide better coverage for both facilities and allow the rangers and superintendent more time and flexibility to better accomplish more important duties.

<u>Permanent Staff</u>	<u>Current</u>	<u>Needs</u>
Park Superintendent III	1	
Park Ranger III	1	

Park Ranger II	1	
Park Ranger I	1	
Maintenance Mechanic III	1	
Maintenance Mechanic I	1	
Office Assistant III	1	1
Processing Assistant III	1	

Seasonal Staff

Assistant Park Ranger, April – Sept.	1	
General Utility Worker, March – Nov.	1	
General Utility Worker, May 15 – Labor Day	1	
Park Attendant, June 1 – Labor Day	1	
Refreshment Stand Clerk, March – Oct.	3	
Refreshment Stand Clerk, Nov. – Feb.	1	
Peak Load Park Attendant, Dec. – Feb.	1	
Peak Load Refreshment Stand Clerk, Nov. – Feb.	1	
Peak Load Office Assistant, Year Round	1	

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